



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation

ADDRESS

TO THE GRADUATES

OF THE

MEDICAL COLLEGE OF GEORGIA,

DELIVERED APRIL 2nd, 1838,

BY THE REV. ELIJAH SINCLAIR,

ONE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

Augusta;

PRINTED BY W. T. THOMPSON & CO.

.....

1838.

JS 2

618.71

REV. E. SINCLAIR :

Dear Sir—At a late meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Medical College of Georgia, we were appointed a committee to return you their thanks for your very appropriate and able address to the Graduates, and to request a copy for publication. With sentiments of highest regard and respect.

Your ob'dt servants,

I. P. GARVIN.

J. A. EVE.

DRS. I. P. GARVIN & JOSEPH A. EVE :

Gentlemen—I herewith furnish the address which I delivered before the Graduates of the Medical College of Georgia. I am very sensible that its claims are of an humble character, nevertheless, if the interests of the College can in any way be subserved by its publication, I shall be gratified. With great respect, I am as ever,

Your ob'dt serv't.

E. SINCLAIR.

ADDRESS.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN :

This occasion is one of interest to the guardians of this institution—to the public—and it should be peculiarly so to you. A train of serious reflections force themselves upon our minds while we pause to contemplate the transactions of this hour.

As we look forward to the future, the question very naturally occurs—what will be the probable results of your new relation to society ?

Perhaps fancy has busied herself in presenting before each one of you some lovely picture, some fairy-form of character, which is to be yours in the distant future.

We know the joy with which youth passes from one achievement to another—we know its hopes—its buoyancy, and none can entertain a more profound respect for these natural emotions when properly guarded, than ourselves. But there are meets and bounds to be set to the pleasures of this occasion.

Whatever may have been the success with which past efforts have been crowned, we contend there is more cause for anxiety and fear in regard to the future, than for joy in reference to the past. This day your relation to society has changed. Your term of pupilage has terminated, and so far as forms are concerned, you are placed on an equality with those who were but yesterday your instructors. Whether you are destined to sustain your new relation to the world is not for us to determine. Time,

which tries all men and all things—time, which bears us onward to our destiny, will reveal this secret. This much we can venture for you—Your future usefulness and your future success are measurably in your own hands; and it will be for you to determine, by lives of assiduity and faithfulness, whether the profession you have just received, under favorable circumstances, shall be honored or disgraced.

On the subject of your future studies we shall say but little; though were it necessary, much could be said, to urge the importance of being, as far as the active duties of the profession will permit, regular and systematic students.

The success which is to attend you will rest, not so much on your previous advantages, as your future industry. Believing that in entering on active duty, you are governed by motives nobler than merely the love of gain, that your ambition will be to honor your calling, we trust your own sense of its importance, and of all true distinction, will always prompt you to the pursuit of knowledge of every kind. It is power and ornament, and should be wedded for its own sake. As practical men, those branches of the profession, which are every day more or less called into exercise, will of course demand your constant attention. But there are two or three which seem to be more elementary in their nature, as forming the basis on which the whole superstructure is reared.

It is natural in the ardour of youth, to look forward to the close of a prescribed course of study, with anxiety, as the termination of toil. But you must be aware of the error of indulging such feelings, especially as you have no doubt been frequently advertised of the labour and difficulty, attending the vocation on which you are about to enter.

A Physician must be an accomplished and ready man. And in order to this, he must not be content with having passed a good examination on his text books: They are to be the text books of his whole life: He has for his study the human frame, a subject intricate and important, and one in which he will ever find something to learn. The late lamented Dr. GODMAN, one of the brightest ornaments that ever graced the profession, laid the foundation of his greatness in this truth, confessed by all, that Anatomy is the corner stone of medical

science. This is a subject, not for the Physician only, but for the Philosopher and the Christian. He takes but a narrow view of his profession, who is content with having passed the regular examination and then lays aside his books, as if the work were done. The wide range that is opened to view in the whole animal kingdom, from the insect to man, the regular gradation that develops itself in the orders of animal existence, the harmony with which nature moves in all the complicated machinery of life, the subserviency of one order to another, and of all to man, as well as the dependence of the different functions of the animal economy on each other, and their adaptation to surrounding circumstances—these, and many others, are the views to be taken of the study of Anatomy, unbounded in variety, interest, and importance. It is the study of this science connected with Physiology, that will render you scientific physicians and able practitioners.

As practical men, a thorough acquaintance with the *Materia Medica* is of the first importance. The great variety of means presented in this department, while it augments the power in operation, adds to the difficulty in selection and combination. Nature, while she has so freely provided for the support of her children, has also in store the remedies by which their diseases may be healed. It is for the profession of medicine to bring out from her store-houses these remedies, to purify, analyze and combine them, in such a manner as shall best subserve the great healing art. But the Physician and Scholar are to be united in this study: the former looks at a plant only as a medicine, studies its application to disease, and its mode of operation on the system, while the latter reads its history and arranges it in the order and species in which nature has brought it forth. The Physician studies a mineral in its operation on the animal tissues, and views it only in those combinations with other substances, in which it is applicable to the various diseases: the scholar extends his researches, and considers it as belonging to the constitution of rocks and mountains, and of the globe itself. That, however, which is of most importance to you as Physicians, in the study of this branch of your profession, is the adaptation of medicines to various diseases, and their specific tendency to different organs. The great distance at which this places the

profession above mere empiricism, the satisfaction of prescribing scientifically, should make you proud of the labour which is requisite to understand it: for knowledge gives conscious dignity to the Physician, and inspires in him a confidence and a pleasure far superior to the satisfaction attendant on healing by chance.

There is one more branch connected with the profession, which we will mention, though we do it with diffidence. It is Chemistry. Its importance gives it claim to a much more extended notice than time will allow us to take, and yet to neglect the mention of it, as forming an interesting subject for study to the professional man, would not be doing justice to the task this day enjoined upon us. While it extends the mind and introduces order to thought, it will ever entertain by its novelty and exactness. By it you are introduced to an acquaintance with the laws that govern the growth, the preservation, or the destruction of all material substances. You should make it your constant care to cultivate an extensive acquaintance with this interesting and important science. Indeed the Physician that goes forth to contend with disease without a knowledge of Chemistry, would be like the soldier on the battle-field, without his arms.

From what we have said on the different branches of science embraced in your profession, you must admit the field for cultivation is large; and that to master all the sciences, necessary to a safe and successful practice, will demand great labour and patient research. What the self-styled Physicians of the day may say against books, science and study, should never influence your efforts; be assured, young gentlemen, there is truth in the science of medicine, or it would have been abandoned long ago.

In the practice of medicine you will meet many obstacles: you will have to contend with ignorance, prejudice and quackery in all their various forms, as well as with the complicated forms of disease. The study of men and a close attention to your own character and conduct will be necessary. You must indeed, "become all things to all men," nor, should you ever hesitate to be the servants of all. To accomplish this task, you must cultivate in yourselves true dignity of character. There

should be no ostentation either of dress or manner. Your persons should always be neat, and your manners gentle and affable. The military chieftain may array himself in costly uniform and pursue distant and reserved manners to his command: This may impress some with a sense of his superiority, and in some instances it may serve to awe the wayward. But your lot in life differs widely from his, your task should be to win all, to awe none. There is no reason why the dress and appearance of a Physician should differ from those of any other gentleman. And yet, it has often happened that young gentlemen of fair talents and excellent attainments have ruined their success by a foppish dress and manner. We would put you on your guard also against manners too precise and formal. An affected gravity, or dignity of manner, is to the sober and common-sense class of mankind most disgusting. No amount of talents or acquirements will protect a Physician from the severe remarks of society, if he fall into this folly. Singularity of every kind should be strictly guarded against. You should be grave, but let it be the gravity which common sense approves. You should be cheerful, yet free from levity—affable, without descending to coarse and vulgar habits.

A Physician should possess strong sympathies. Tenderness in an attending Physician always produces the most happy effects. Should you assume a business-like manner in the sick room, or betray a want of interest in the case of your patient, he will think you care but little for him, his confidence in you will be impaired, and your remedies will be lightly esteemed. It is often remarked that Physicians are wanting in sympathy and tenderness of feeling: this is inferred from the intercourse which they daily have with the miseries of mankind: some are inclined to think that the commonness of human suffering blunts the more tender sensibilities of their nature and leaves them indifferent to the wretchedness of their fellow beings. We know the tendency of our nature to become familiar with scenes that are at first shocking and afflicting. And yet we are happy to attest from a long and extensive acquaintance with medical gentlemen, that the allegation does not apply to them as a body of men. Indeed we should do injustice to our own feelings, as well as to the profession, if we were not to say that the most ten-

der and refined sensibilities which we have ever witnessed, have been among medical men. Your sympathies will often be worth more than your medicines, and we may safely venture the assertion that in no case will they prove injurious.

A Physician should be prompt. His word of promise should be his bond. His long delays and his repeated failures to meet engagements, can find no apology but in circumstances over which he has no control. Nothing will ruin a Physician sooner than non-compliance with his professional engagements. Cherish therefore a strict regard for the sacredness of your own promises. Two things will be calculated to have a great bearing on this point. First, your time must be economised, you must live by rule, every thing must be done in its own proper time and place, and then there will be time and place for every thing. Secondly, you must not regard your own ease and comfort, and you must avoid effeminacy. It must never be too cold—too hot—too wet—too dark—nor too far for you to meet the calls that may be made upon your services as professional men. Industry is essential to a Physician. Indeed we know of no honest calling in life for which indolence could be considered a valuable qualification; but its effects will be particularly deleterious in the profession which you are about to pursue.

A Physician should be strictly *temperate*. The age is past in which Physicians might indulge in that most ruinous vice, *Intemperance*, and yet retain their practice. Too much light has been thrown upon this subject by the sad experience of thousands, for it to be tolerated in the case of one so responsible to society as the Physician. Dr. RUSH cautioned his students against using ardent spirits in the preparation of medicines, except in cases absolutely necessary, which cases are rare in their occurrence. The immense danger involved in the common use of it as a beverage, and in the introduction of it into your medicines, should be enough to fix your minds against it. There exists no doubt that the influence of medical gentlemen is felt on this subject, no matter into which scale that influence may be thrown. It is no flattery when we say that no class of men, not even the ministers of the sanctuary, are so competent to the task of putting down intemperance, as the practitioners of medicine. The

ablest arguments which have ever been urged against intemperance have emanated from medical men—arguments which must be felt as long as men continue to read and think: indeed, the cause of temperance owes (if not its origin) its success, mainly to the untiring efforts of this profession: in pursuance, therefore, of your own best interests, and in mercy to the world, let your motto be “Touch not, taste not.”

It may not be improper to give you some advice as to the course you should pursue towards those of your own profession. It sometimes happens that Physicians imbibe great dislikes for each other and deal in expressions calculated to bear upon those who might be deemed their rivals: this is always unfortunate. Should your rival in the profession attract great attention—if he really triumph over disease, rejoice that the profession has fallen into hands so able to do it justice—if otherwise, take it for granted that his incompetency will be soon discovered, and his air-built fame speedily pass away.

We must be allowed to give you some counsel on the subject of professional secrecy. When you are employed in families particularly, the highest confidence is placed in your prudence, as well as your honor; take good care that you do not sully the one by the neglect of the other. The particulars of any case that may fall under treatment do not belong to the news of the day; they were with the patient alone till, induced by his confidence in your skill as well as your honour and prudence, he communicated them to you, and with you they should rest, unless circumstances justify communication on that subject.

A Physician should be, in the strictest sense of the word, a Christian philosopher. The study of medicine should not be more likely to produce infidelity, than that of the Bible itself. In the one case we read what the *Almighty* has *said*, in the other we read what he has *done*. In the wide range of your studies, the most sublime ideas of the character of the Almighty will be presented to your contemplation. The skill with which the human body is arranged, the delicate and complicated character of its machinery, and its adaptation to the varied circumstances of existence, must constrain you to exclaim, with the King of Israel, “I will praise thee, for I am

fearfully and wonderfully made." The fact, too, that in nature there is to be found a remedy for every disease, should inspire you with reverence for that wisdom by which all things are created and governed. Besides the religious influences which belong to the study of your profession, there are in its practice many circumstances which strongly urge the Physician to look beyond the present sublunary state of existence:—his business is not with the unthinking crowd: his calling does not associate him with the gay and happy: at every step he is met by the faded pleasures of earth: almost every day presents him with the withered, or withering hopes of some fellow being: mortality is ever before him: he feels alternately the last beating pulse of the tender babe, the youth and the hoary headed sire. He is present when friend closes the eyes of friend in death; he hears the soul's farewell to earth; he sees the tears of affection and sorrow, and hears the lamentations of friends bereaved. He is with men in their honest hour—he sees how shocking the summons of death to him who is unfurnished for his journey, or with what calmness and resignation the good man leaves this world, assured of another and a better beyond the grave! And whether he be called to witness the departure of one who mourns over an ill-spent life, or of one who, in the hour when heart and flesh are failing, rejoices that he has kept the faith, his testimony must be in favor of religion. The practice of medicine will call you to mingle in scenes of distress for which human philosophy can furnish no alleviation—where the principles and doctrines of a pure Christianity can alone avail. In such cases, how fortunate the Physician who has made that wisdom which cometh from above his study and his choice! But should you never be pious yourselves, let us impress you with the propriety of treating the religious hopes and fears of your patients with great respect and tenderness. Take for your models on this all-important subject, the characters of GREGORY, HALLER, HOFFMAN, SIDENHAM, and our own distinguished RUSH. They were examples of all human excellence, elevating at once the profession of your choice and our common nature.

Allow us in the next place, to remind you of your duty to the poor. Of you it may justly be said, "The poor ye have always with you." They are by far the largest part of our race; and if

helplessness and wretchedness constitute claims, they have many.

Here is an ample field for your skill as Physicians and your benevolence as men—where science may gather her proudest wreath, and man appear most like his God! In your visits to the poor, you should be plain in your manners, kind in your feelings, instructive in your conversation, accommodating yourselves as much as possible to the most ignorant and illiterate. When called to the poor, pause not with the miser to ask, who shall pay me for my work; but remember, “He who giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.” True it is, that most of the poor may never compensate you with gold and silver, and yet you shall have a richer reward. The blessing of them who were ready to perish, shall come upon you. The smile of heaven and the approbation of a good conscience, shall be your compensation. And never forget what the talented and virtuous BOERHAAVE said “The poor are my best patients, for God is their *paymaster*.”

In taking leave of you, young Gentlemen, permit me to bid you God speed in your noble calling! May you be to many as springs of living water in a thirsty desert—May your course through life be marked with success and distinction—May you be ornaments to your profession and blessings to society.

We cannot close our remarks on this occasion without a word of congratulation to the friends and officers of this College:—We remember the days when our supporters were few—our difficulties many; these have all vanished before our zeal and perseverance and warm friends have been multiplied, not only in every section of our own State, but far beyond her borders. The Medical College of Georgia now stands proudly among the kindred institutions of our country, shedding the lights and blessings of science upon the people, in grateful return for the liberal patronage of their legislators—and abiding witness of their enlightened policy. And to the members of the Faculty, we would say, still labour on, not for the present only, but for the future—continue with your wanted faithfulness and ability, in your noble enterprise, and you shall have bestowed on posterity a lasting benefit, and erected to yourselves an imperishable monument!

